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ABSTRACT

As communication tools change, the field of advertising will be affected. The videotelephone will be available to consumers and corporations and may be used along with fast-scan facsimile devices or with electronic video recording (EVR). While it offers privacy and security and holds wide implications for sales promotional and public relations activities, it will probably have only a small potential for advertising. Two-way cable television (CATV) offers the possibility of shopping at home, playing interactive computer games, and receiving newspapers and magazines. This medium may have a massive impact on advertising, and if symbiotic facsimile devices and EVRs are accepted commercially, then this could be the prime conduit for advertising messages. Computers are an integral part of both the videotelephone system and the two-way CATV, and on-line retrieval may have a large impact on the advertising industry. In conjunction with the systems mentioned, home and office keyboards will provide access to a centralized computer, and information retrieved may arrive along with an advertising message. A rating system and audience measurement for users of home keyboards will need to be developed also. (TJ)

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ADVERTISING AND THE HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY MEDIA IN TWO THOUSAND OUGHT ONE

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ADVERTISIN G AND THE HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY MEDIA IN TWO THOUSAND OUGHT ONE

This paper will concern itself with a look at the future of the advertising business. Will it be an engineering megabuzz of new communication media? An ad-enriched cacophony of electronic celestial trumpets? And will new and more powerful computer algorithms propel advertising agencies into mystic--yet bodacious--seers of a new industrial society? Or will this bumptious, vigorous industry be emasculated and reduced to a prim and even dutiful body servant of consumer/governmental agencies? An Orphan Annie of the media world? Will there be no Son of Fear, as DellaFemina puts it? Will Future Shock really become Future Dull?

It would seem instructive to arrange and contrast the major considerations relating to future changes in our communication channels, and note probable outcomes affecting the field of advertising.

Most forecasts of the future are based upon extending present trends and even magnifying them (Montgomery, 1976; Unwin, 1974; Harper, 1973; Weiss, 1973). But in the case of advertising media--with sweeping technological changes about to burst upon us--it would seem that this approach would fall short. Engineers forecast almost science-fiction-like communication artifacts in the hands of industry and the consumer; therefore, a more speculative approach will be used. The focus will be upon probable communication tools of 2001, and necessary advertising processes and functions will be estimated from these.

Background

Signs, marks, and towncriers made up the earliest advertising media. Moveable type introduced a new wave of media-catalogs, almanacs, books, newspapers and magazines. Beginning with crystal sets, the electronic industry provided radio (short wave, long wave, etc.) television (UHF, VHF), and more recently, the computer (batch, interactive; digital, analog).

The United States entered the age of resource scarcity and information surplus at about the same point in time--roughly 1970. An Information Industry Association Bulletin (1977) points out that since that point more transactions occurred in information equivalents of current events and existing artifacts than occurred in the events and artifacts themselves. Thus we are entering a multi-channel, information-rich era, one in which both the business man and the housewife will engage in new communication management behaviors. How will they cope? What communication appliances will be used in the home and the office?

Massive Shifts in Media Technology

The videotelephone. Dickson and Bowers (1974) in their carefully-drawn assessment of the videotelephone and its ramifications, delineated the significant potential of this medium for both consumers and corporations. The authors indicated that use of videotelephones will lead to a demand to have access to information stored in a computer in order to enable a single desk-top device to serve both the role of a computer terminal and a personal communications tool. The computer need not be on the user's premises.

Fast-scan facsimile devices are seen in a symbiotic role with video-telephones. These will enable users to convert "soft copy" video output to "hard copy" (paper copy), of graphs, charts, data, etc.

Also perhaps playing a complementary role with the videotelephone are such devices as EVR (electronic video recording), taking such forms as video-

cassettes, videorecords, videodiscs, etc. It was estimated that present technology allows casettes to hold 60 minutes of color recording, or the equivalent of several books, if printed material were accessed.

Forecasts indicate the entry path for the videotelephone will most probably be in the business office, with secondary application in the home. To be noted is the degree of privacy or security that is a general attribute of this medium; privacy is preserved in most applications of this technology. On balance, it would seem that this telesystem has only small potential for advertising; on the other hand, it would seem to have wide implications for sales promotional and public relations activities.

Two-way Cable Television (CATV). Two-way CATV promises to be a technology with a significant impact that will compete directly with videotelephones in many applications (Goldmark, 1972; Baer, 1971).

Two-way CATV refers to a television terminal not only able to receive signals, but also able to send signals to the program distribution center. Note, however, that the system does not usually envision communication between receivers, as is possible with videotelephone.

Dickson and Bowers explain its uses in this fashion:

> Here are some of the services that a computer controlled, interactive two-way CATV could do: shopping at home, restaurant menu information, computer assisted instruction; local entertainment, information, transportation, timetables, consumer product ratings, and comparative prices of commodities in local markets. Interactive computer games could be offered such as checkers and chess, as well as games invented especially for the medium. The sending and receiving of mail could also be accomplished by two-way CATV. A fascimile attachment could make hard copy when desired. Newspapers and magazines could also be distributed by this method, perhaps overnight when the system would otherwise be underutilized. (p. 49)

More visionary reports (Smith, 1970; Walker, et al, 1971) tend to see CATV as superceding videotelephone by becoming a substitute telephone and videotelephone network. In this scenario, two-way interaction between subscribers is forecast.

Leonard, et al (1971) have called attention to the potential of two-way CATV to provide an advance in participatory democracy, providing instant referendums, and simple opinion polling, despite such dangers as "loaded questions," etc.

Thus, one could argue that massive impact would be made upon advertising if two-way CATV comes into wider use than the videotelephone. If symbiotic facsimile devices, plus EVRs, are accepted commercially, the two-way CATV system could become the prime conduit for advertising messages.

Computers and the Age of Information. The computer is depicted as being an integral part of both the videotelephone expanded system and the two-way CATV.

At the current rate of the information explosion, ~~in~~ 2001 A.D. the top executives of this country will have instant computerized on-line access to two and one half billion documents. This estimate is based upon evidence that in 1975, over 46 million documents were available through on-line computer technology (Doebler, 1977) and the trend has an accelerating growth curve. Nominally, on-line computer retrieval is an artifact of business; yet obviously, it has implications for consumer use. In fact, Gumpert (1977) estimated that up to 100,000 mini computers are now escounsed in private homes.

Barnouw (1977) had these pertinent comments:

> It is assumed by most telecommunications futurists that some of the choices available via your push-button (digital) controls will be free-sponsored by advertisers or available as a government service--while others will involve payment. (p. 80).

Yet questions remain. Who will be the gatekeepers? Will privacy survive? Will authority become more concentrated--or less?

In general, the thrust of the literature points to both a) an era of citizen feedback and interaction with media, as well as b) continued passive reception of videoed events.

In any case, much "media" will be received through multiple channels. News may be viewed on the screen, printed out in a facsimile message, and even later received through the mail as part of a news letter or magazine. The definition of media--fuzzy at best--will become further fragmented. When a "Time" arrives in the mail, or over the TV screen, or facsimile printer, which is the medium and which is the message? Or more accurately, which is mass media and which is individualized media?

A Scenario With Keyboard

One scenario--for home and office--that emerges from these forecasts is as follows:

The Business-Office Keyboard. The communication behaviors of a business person will revolve around a rather sophisticated centralized keyboard. The principle operating system will be the videotelephone. Most transactions that are "dialed" through the system are charged for. Both slow and fast scan images are possible--slow scan being the "economy" mode--and color and black and white reception and sending are typical options. Hard copies arrive via facsimile printers of materials displayed on the screen, upon request. This technology is somewhat high cost, in terms of information per hour of use, but privacy is gained, as well as speed, if one is trained in use of the system. A portion of the system will be dedicated to use of two-way CATV, but this will be of lesser value and perhaps will be provided mainly as a "backup" system to the videotelephone.

The Home Keyboard. Here the principle operating system will be two-way CATV, with perhaps an auxiliary mode of videotelephone, for the wealthier subscribers.

Most probably, this system will be lower in cost, yet still have great versatility. Each consumer-subscriber will access a centralized computer system and much of the information retrieved will arrive along with an "advertising message." This will be used to offset high subscription costs. It is assumed that this system will also have an integrated facsimile printer, as well as EVR capability. Books, movies, plays, or entertainment games will arrive along with commercial advertising messages, much like today's television. News, etc., will be of a generally broad, diffused nature. Many items will be merely listed, and the subscriber must request specific programs, details of news events, etc. Such "private" messages will tend to escalate upward the basic low rate of the video display.

An essential difference between the Office Keyboard and the Home Keyboard will be the mode of communication behaviors. Subscribers to the Office Keyboard will by and large use an interactive mode of communication with the videotelephone system. Home subscribers, on the other hand, will tend to use both passive and active interaction modes with the CATV system. In other words, the home subscriber can merely passively watch a travel show, or he or she can punch a command on the keyboard to obtain a programmed self-instruction text on math, shop prices of goods at competing stores, or play a game of computer chess.

The Government Network. As the consumer will have literally thousands of options in interacting with the system, there will be increasing need perceived by governmental agencies to "make contact." Thus, it would seem not too unlikely that the federal government, and possibly even state and

local governments, will establish their own "channels" to which the consumer-citizen may dial for news, information, advice, etc. This network may exist on both the videotelephone system and the two-way CATV.

Implications for Advertising

The reader must be cautioned that this forecast should be given a low mark on accuracy, as much of the conclusions here are based upon speculative data. Nevertheless, given that some of the preceding assumptions may prove correct, then the implications for advertising include:

*Advertisers and advertising agencies should begin preliminary plans for implementation of functions and procedures for when two-way CATV becomes the dominant distribution center for advertising messages, regardless of media "form."

*Preliminary plans should be made that project use of the videotelephone for public relations and sales promotional activities.

*Plans should be "roughed-in" in which the demographic and sociographic attributes of Home Keyboard behaviors of the subscribers are outlined in a useful way. The point here is that a whole new form of ratings and audience measurements will need to be developed.

In summary, the concepts discussed here would imply that continuation of the advertising function in the new technologies is a rational, realistic notion. Advertising will continue to flourish albeit in new forms. Information management and selection will be the chief problem of the consumer. Should not advertising assist this process?

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